

# Through Vailiancy

by Sir Gabriel

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Summary: Sylvain, now an official Spartan, prepares to meet those who had first borne Halsey's designs. Please leave suggestions for improvement as reviews!

## 1. Chapter 1: Craft's Last Stand

**\*\*1415 Hours, August 13, 2550 (Military Calendar)\*\***

**\*\*Lambda Serpentis System, Goldarch Plateau, planet Craft.  
\*\***

"Contacts, I repeat, enemy contacts, two o' clock south of my position."

Sergeant Davis Brewman and his six-man unit concealed themselves within the surrounding forests of a long strip of clearing. The strip traveled all the way to Stronghold Alpha. The UNSC had planned to utilize this clearing, and launch a hidden assault against the base's northwestern corner. Brewman's unit's objective was to prevent the UNSC troops from exiting the clearing, and approaching the base.

The UNSC troops began to march down the clearing. A squad of twenty took point, guns at their sides. They still had a full kilometer to go before they would arrive at the stronghold. Brewman would take quick advantage of their opened and exposed flanks. Quietly, over his radio, Brewman whispered, "Open fire."

MA5B Assault Rifle reports echoed throughout the clearing, forests, and northern canyons. The UNSC soldiers, in a box-formation march, began to drop to the dirt on all sides. But as the center and front soldiers began to break off in a sprint, Brewman removed a fragmentation grenade from his shoulder belt, pulled the pin, counted to three, and hurled the small explosive device into the very epicenter of the confusion. The explosion added to the ruckus that the rifles began, but Brewman ordered, "Fire short, controlled bursts of three, and conserve ammunition. Exit the forest slowly." Brewman

stood behind his cover as he watched his troops slowly pull out, and finish off the stragglers. Four wounded lay groaning on the grass. They would make excellent prisoners of war.

Brewman quickly contacted his commanding corporal, Jim Stange. "Our forces have neutralized a UNSC strike team. How are things on your end, sir?"

Stange returned, "Everything is running good. Our defenses are looking ready for a war. Pull out of there."

Brewman, grinning, stepped out of his hiding place, and praised his squad. "Excellent work, boys. Grab those wounded soldiers, and we'll haul on back to the base. Corporal Stange is going to need all the help he can get withâ€"

As Brewman had spoken that last word, the report of a distant S2 Sniper Rifle was heard echoing off the rocks. A split-second later, Brewman's crimson blood began to gush out of a bullet sized hole exit wound in his neck, mizing in the with the dirt, turning it into queer maroon mud.

The other five members of Brewman's unit quickly scattered, and dashed for cover, but the hidden sniper claimed two more victims in this massacre. Had they gotten out of this sticky situation, they would need a new sergeant.

A kilometer south, Corporal Stange watched as his massive 200-man unit, Gemini Squad, quickly set up a daunting defense line. A smile crossed his lips as he trotted down an imaginary boundary line that separated the resistance land from the vast unclaimed territory of Craft. Humourously, a soldier had planted a wooden sign along the line. Scrawled in white paint and bad handwriting read, "Point of no UNSC return."

Static from an incoming transmission had shattered Stange's peaceful indulgence of pride in his oversized squad. Instinctively, he slapped the comm., and greeted properly, "This is Corporal Stange, go ahead"

A panicked, terrified voice had come back. "This is Brewman's squad," he cried with genuine fear. "The sergeant is down, and we got two others dead from sniper fire! We need reinforcements, now!"

Stange frowned. He had known that this event was going to happen, he just didn't figure it would be so soon. Field Commander Joel Hansen had placed Brewman's six-man crew so far from the stronghold and so close to the UNSC invasion landing point to serve as an observation/sacrificial unit. Their only real objective was to stand position a kilometer north of the stronghold in the hidden pass, and see just how long it would take them to get wasted. Lives of perfectly good soldiers were being spent uselessly, and now that they were under attack, the UNSC would undoubtedly finish them off in seconds, and hurry to attack Stronghold Alpha. Stange's squad would have to work double-fast to prepare for the UNSC battalion to arrive.

"Negative, soldier," Stange muttered with a pang of regret and sorrow. He desperately wanted to send a reconnaissance force over there, and pull the troops out, but Hansen would bust him down to

Private Third Class for insubordination. Stange sputtered out a lame-assed excuse as to why his understandable request had to be denied. And Stange hated excuses, especially from himself.

Before the soldier even had the chance to respond, his screams of pain had mixed in with assault rifle sprays. Brewman's unit was as good as gone.

Stange wiped the guilty sweat away from his forehead with his sleeve. He knew that he was going to burn in hell for that, but at least Hansen would be doing the same right alongside him.

"Listen up, kiddies," Stange addressed his entire 200-man unit over a bullhorn. "Those UNSC S.O.B's will be here in fifteen minutes, so you had better get your asses in gear, and get this sorry excuse of a boundary defense line up and ready for action, lickety-split!" Stange had always been notoriously tough with his soldiers, but that was the reason why they were possibly the best in the entire resistance army. \_Those UNSC troops had better be ready for one helluva bash\_, he thought with glee as he placed a cigar in his mouth and lit it, readying himself for the upcoming battle.

Inside a small four-man trenched defense post, Field Commander Joel Hansen watched as Gemini Squad had put the finishing touches on their defense. They were two-thirds of a kilometer away from the bunker-post, but Hansen was very cautious when it came to his own personal safety. Manning the forward LAAG M41 chain gun mounted outside the tall window was Single Lieutenant (First Class) Sylvain Reno. His duty for the day was to guard the Field Commander. In the event that the UNSC had broken through the boundary line, it was his job to hold the enemy off, and even escort the Field Commander to safety if need be.

Sylvain had generally been green to combat, but he was a natural fighter, having taken a Spartan with his team on the field. Already having been involved in three consecutive and decisive victories over the UNSC had earned him his higher rank, and, at only 24 years of age, he wanted to see more combat action. As a Single Lieutenant, he had devised and carried out many successful strategies, and high command officials opted to promote him to Primary Lead Strategist. However, Sylvain had turned it down. He didn't want a desk job. He wanted to fight, and, more importantly to all, he wanted to win.

"Did you hear that, sir?" Sylvain asked as he turned to Hansen. The Field Commander could see blue fire burn from the young man's eyes. "The UNSC is about to engage our forces at the boundary defense line. Do you think Stange and Gemini can force them into retreat?"

Old Hansen let out a sigh. "I sure hope so, Reno. If his team is broken up, I'm counting on you to give those UNSC bastards a run for their money."

Sylvain gave off a reassuring grin as his palms wrapped around the LAAG's handles tightly. "That's why I'm here, sir."

Hansen ran a hand through his silvery hair, grinned back, and asked, "Do you think you will be having to use that gun today, Lieutenant?"

"Well, sir," Sylvain said as his fiery eyes glanced out onto the soon-to-be battlefield. "I hope not." He gave his beret a tug, and it had a slight tilt to the left side of his head. "I really hope not."

With the UNSC now only 500 meters away from the stronghold's walls, Stange had retreated to the safety of his command bunker, and watched everything through a pair of high-powered binoculars. The UNSC troops were just beginning to pop up over the hills that littered the Goldarch Plateau. He keyed his communicator to all frequencies, and shouted, "Showtime, boys and girls! Give 'em hell!" The sounds of automatic gunfire rumbled through the plateau as rebellion soldiers hosed the UNSC squads with lead. Many of the front brigades had dropped, and the units behind them quickly returned fire. Soldiers chatted and hollered over the radio as the battle raged into a fierce and frenzied start-off. Stange remained in his bunker, giving out commands. He had been their above eyes, and told them to watch for strange enemy unit movement. But his attention would be turned to another direction as he listened to a transmission over the louder emergency frequency. "Watch out, enemy troops at two o' clock of the front gates! Someone take care of them!"

Stange's hardened expression transformed into a menacing grin as he quickly ordered, "Fireteam Bravo, get over there, and shove a firecracker in their ass!" A private responded back with a cheerful, "Roger, Corporal!"

Fireteam Bravo was a unit designed by Stange for special tasks. Consisting of three soldiers, who carried Jackhammer Rocket Launchers, and the other held a sidearm along with extra rockets and frag grenades for the other soldiers. As per orders, the three of them quickly climbed up the eastern gate's ladder. Each soldier quickly darted as fast as they could across the thin catwalk. As the two o' clock reinforcement troop came into view, the lead soldier fell to one knee, aimed his loaded launcher at the foes, and laughed, "Only six UNSC regular marines? What kind of trouble could they cook up?" And with that, he squeezed the extended trigger, and the rocket tore through the air, splashing onto the troops, sending flame, dirt, and blood flying into the air. "Nice shot!" The demolitions carrier complimented. The leader keyed his comm., and reported to Stange. "The UNSC sneaks have been put down, sir!"

That one hidden troop was the only worry that had come to Stange. Now that it had been halted, he could relax a little. "Good work Fireteam Bravo. Hold position, and send your rockets against their forward attack brigade," he calmly ordered. The leader acknowledged, "You got it, sir! Engaging UNSC brigades!" Stange knew those Jackhammers would work wonders in slowing down the UNSC advancing troop. It looked like the rebellion forces would be claiming victory over the retreating UNSC attack teams, and Stange anticipated it as he puffed on another cigar. He kicked his feet up on his desk, and relaxed. The UNSC would have to think twice before they decided to mess with this rebellion faction on their home turf.

But as his eyes traveled over to the distant skies covering the far-off crags at the end of the plateau, his jaw fell, dropping the cigar to the metal plated floor of the bunker.

Sylvain released his grip from the LAAG a good time ago. The recent successes of Stange's unit had diminished the thought of firing the

massive gun. "It's looking good, " he happily exclaimed, grinning from ear to ear. "It is looking very good, sir!" The old Hansen had also cracked a smile. It was a rarity. Normally, Hansen expressed the view of thousands of rough and tough missions. It was, indeed, looking good. In no time at all, the battle would be ending.

But corporal Stange's stammering echoed in the bunker, and Sylvain's eyes filled with sheer terror. "C-Covenant Battle Armada t-taking positions above! I want tightened defenses all around! Get on those damn AA guns! Do you hear me? Tighten those damn defenses up, triple time!"

Sylvain had never fought the Covenant before in his life, but he had heard horrifying tales from those who had survived their 'holy' onslaught. How they blasted each and every human colonized planet into molted magma with their space bombardment plasma cannons. But the fear would have to be pushed away. \_No time for that\_, he thought. Quickly, he turned to a firearms rack, grabbed an MA5B assault rifle, two handfuls of ammunition magazines, and a radio. "I'm going out there to help out! C'mon, sir!" Sylvain shouted to his Field Commander.

Hansen sat motionless; frozen in thought. How could this have happened? Craft was such a remote and secluded planet, a good distance from the Lambda Serpentis System, and he doubted that the Covenant knew it existed. Hell, it took the UNSC a good three decades to discover and register it. It housed a large number of resistance faction members. Its destruction would be a lethal injection for the resistance against UNSC. There hadn't been a trace of Covenant forces since the bases had been established. Why did they suddenly show up now, at the worst of all possible times?

Battle preparations were well underway as the four Covenant cruisers prepared to attack Craft, and destroy every human on it, UNSC or otherwise. The Shipmaster and leader of this operation granted to him by the Prophets, watched as twenty massive U-shaped drop ships blasted out of the bays, carrying a hundred soldiers each. Soma 'Nogalee, the shipmaster, had started to ponder the peculiar objectives and aspects of this mission.

The Prophets had advised him to commence bombardment only after a thorough search of the base had been completed. The hope of discovering a small bit of information was extremely vital to this mission. The human rebels could have the coordinate information of Earth, the humans' home world. If that was discovered, 'Nogalee would be pronounced the hero of the war, and an instrument of the Gods. Failure would not be an option, he vowed.

"Covenant drop ships landing at three o' clock! All defense pull away from the frontal base, and engage the Covenant!" Corporal Stange frantically ordered in a yell over the bullhorn. The UNSC was the least of their worries.

Sylvain was desperate to join the others in battling the Covenant, but Hansen barely moved a muscle as he glared at the concrete flooring. "Sir!" He shouted over and over. The Lieutenant fired a shot into the ceiling, and Hansen snapped out of his silent stupor. His courage was rekindled by Sylvain's blue, burning eyes.

"Sir," Sylvain repeated, "Let's get out there, and help our fellow

soldiers! We can't do much just sitting here!"

Hansen awoke, and grinned, "You're right, kid. Come on." Hansen grabbed his only weapon, an M9 sidearm, and stood up. "I haven't seen real combat action in twenty years," Hansen sighed. "But I'm gonna do my God-damndest."

Sylvain and Hansen dashed to the eastern section of the base. Crowds of their fellow soldiers, in the midst of intense combat, were all vying for a top part of the wall. Towers equipped with LAAG chain guns and HE Class 3 rocket launchers provided tremendous support from the UNSC ground units and pesky but deadly Covenant Seraph fighters buzzing around above their heads. Plasma bolts surged through the air, sizzling the outer ceramics of the walls and gates clean off. Shouting of the soldiers could be heard as they taunted the Covenant. A foolish group of soldiers, too brave for their own good, jumped the walls, and fought the Covenant from the outside. Their comms went dead five seconds later.

Before Sylvain and Hansen had even arrived at the attack point, an explosion rang out, knocking troops off their feet. But they quickly jumped back up, and fired into the smoking hole that was once the gate of the base.

Sylvain and Hansen quickly found Stange, blasting his MA5B rifle down at the Covenant approaching his command post. Sylvain cried out to him.

In an instant, he was on the ground, and saluting both higher officers.

"Sir, I don't know where the hell these bastards came out from," he began, "but I know that we can't hold them off forever!" His voice was almost inaudible over the gunfire and explosions.

Hansen knew he had to abandon his base, but there were serious issues that had to be taken care of. The entire base would have to be destroyed, or else, the Covenant would know about Earth. Next, an escape seemed almost impossible, but there had to be some way.

UNSC Longsword fighters began to take flybys of the Stronghold, reducing whole buildings to rubble. Rebellion troops manned the anti-aircraft guns. GA202 Surface-to-Space shells cruised up to the Longswords.

Stange turned to the gunners, and shouted over the comm., "Focus on the Covenant cruisers!"

Hansen stood, thinking about a possible way off of the doomed rock of Craft. But only one way seemed best; asking the UNSC for a ride.

When he had told Sylvain and Stange this plan, both laughed. "What are we gonna do," Stange managed out, "ask, 'pretty please?'"

Hansen gave Stange an angered glare right in the eye. "Let's hear a better idea from you, then, Corporal," he snarled.

It went against everything the resistance had stood for, but they had to do it. Sylvain reluctantly agreed with Hansen. He grabbed his

radio from the rig on his belt, and called, "This is Lieutenant Sylvain Reno calling any UNSC Personnel."

The three awaited a response.

Soon, a crackling transmission came through the sound, "Roger. This is Echo 615. What s your position, over."

Sylvain replied with newfound eagerness. "We are on the grounds of the complex under attack. We request immediate extraction. Send in as many Pelicans as you can."

When he ended the transmission, Sylvain kicked himself. He sounded just like a UNSC Marine regular.

Seven minutes later, fifteen UNSC Pelicans landed within the grounds of the besieged base. Longsword fighters ended their attacks for a moment, and flew cover for the human drop ships.

Hansen grabbed Stange's radio, and commanded, "All units, this is Lead Force. Priority orders are to retreat into the Pelican drop ships. The UNSC is getting us out of here."

Almost instantly, the soldiers quit their defense posts, and dashed to the Pelicans, speeding for dear life. One by one, they were loaded up, all that remained of a doomed defense was the bloody corpses of the fallen soldiers, friend or foe.

When each and every breathing soldier was safely on a Pelican, Sylvain, Stange, and Hansen jumped onto their own Pelicans, Echo 615. Inside was a trio of Spartan-II soldiers, and each of them aimed their assault rifles at them. "Drop your weapons," one ordered, his voice thick and powerful. It didn't even sound human.

Hansen and Stange, out of fear, complied with their demands, but Sylvain just stood defiantly, gritting his teeth.

"I said put all of your weapons down, now." The Spartan repeated, his tone growing aggravated.

Sylvain slowly did so, and they were seated. Each Spartan soldier sat alongside each resistance member, keeping their firearms poised at the center of mass of their prisoners.

The Pelican took rough air, and its altitude rose drastically as the pilot flew his bird up through the hellish and battle scarred atmosphere.

"Hang on back there," he warned. "This is going to get bumpy for the first few minutes."

Each soldier sat while the Spartans did their best to keep their aim at the prisoners. It was a surprise that they didn't restrain them at all.

The ship rattled, and some loose gear tumbled down before floating. They had made it into space, and were home free.

The pilot activated the artificial gravity systems, and the ballistic vests and ammunition clips fell to the deck with metallic thuds.

Sylvain felt his weight suddenly return, and he had coughed a few times, re-catching his breath.

The remainder of the ride started off quietly. The pilot informed over the speaker, "One hour until we dock with the Silver Stallion."

For fifteen minutes, Sylvain watched as the Spartans kept its head pointed at him, along with its rifle. He could tell it was communicating with the others. He checked the identification information on the Spartan's chest. It read SPARTAN-203.

Sylvain didn't care. For years, he had gone through rigorous training to hate the UNSC, and the Covenant. Stange and Hansen had given up, but Sylvain wasn't about to. He would much rather go down fighting his enemies rather than rot in a UNSC jail cell. And he had killed a Spartan before. Of course, he had much more resources at his disposal, and there was only one of them. He locked eyes with the Corporal, and kept staring at him.

Stange could see the fires of rage burning with him. The young Lieutenant Reno was about to do something dreadfully insane. With his eyes, Stange advised against it.

Sylvain sat in wait. He watched the other Spartans sitting, and keeping their guard up. Sylvain knew they wouldn't be using their assault rifles. A single bullet from the gun could thin the hull, decompress the air, and the cabin would pop like a balloon. So what if one of them did try something funny? What would they do? How would they react?

Hansen's eyes closed, and he silently slipped his hand into his pocket, and started to pull out an unknown object out. Sylvain knew what it was: his pipe. Hansen had always smoked out of that thing regularly, and he supposed that he would to rub the edge to calm himself down. Sylvain had caught him doing so at times of stress.

But Stange's Spartan quickly turned, and must have told the leader that Hansen was revealing a hidden firearm. The Spartan, with one hand, grabbed Hansen's head, and snapped his neck in half a second. The pipe fell onto the metal flooring.

Sylvain's rage had completely boiled over. The Spartans had just murdered his commanding officer, one whom he had come to respect.

"You bastard!" Sylvain cried out as he dove down onto the deck, and made a reach for the fallen MA5B that dropped onto the floor during takeoff. He had his palms wrapped around the grips, and had drawn a bead on a Spartan when 203 had quickly chopped his neck with the side of his hand. Sylvain had fallen, and his red beret fell onto the deck, beside Hansen's pipe.

Stange shut his eyes tightly. Both of his officers were now down and dead. It looked like he would have to be taking command of the troops if they would be released. His eyes opened to a squint, and he glanced at the two personal belongings of his fallen compatriots. Hansen's pipe had symbolized wisdom, intelligence, and tranquility. Sylvain's red beret had symbolized courage, heroism, and pride. He



would keep those objects with him, as a reminder of two one-in-a-million warriors, willing to pay the ultimate price for their causes had the time come. His view transitioned over to the sprawled body of Sylvainâ€|

â€|and he noticed a small rise and falling of his chest.

Stange almost jumped. His commanding officer wasn't dead, just knocked unconscious. He almost thanked Spartan for not killing him, but instead, he pointed over to Sylvain, and said jovially, "The Lieutenant is alive!"

The Spartan quickly picked him up and returned him to his seat. Only now, he had restrained Sylvain's arms and legs. There was a chance that he would awaken, and try to attack a second time. Then, he grabbed his assault rifle, and jammed the barrel of the weapon onto his left temple.

Stange sighed. He may be a P.O.W, but he had his squad, and one of his friends. He wouldn't be alone.

## 2. Chapter 2: Best of the Best

0530 Hours, December 15, 2550 (Military Calendar)/

**\*\*Epsilon Eridani System, Reach Military Complex,\*\***

**\*\*Planet Reach.\*\***

"On your feet, trainee!" an instructor barked, snapping Sylvain out of his sound slumber.

Instantly, he hopped out of his military cot, the disorientation of awakening in such a rude manner dissipating in a fraction of a second. Without having to be told to, he swiftly dashed to the showers, deftly maneuvering his path to curve around any obstacles of other cots, and trunks that might impede. With a light touch to the shower spigot, lukewarm water sprayed all over his body, spewing a thick, white soap as well. He was then rinsed in sudden jets of icy cold water. Three seconds later, he was completely dry from the high-powered fan system located inside of the stall. Behind the stall door, he slipped on his sweat top and pants, which had been freshly cleansed of any body filth, and laid out, hanging upon a hook on the neutral tiled wall. He stepped out of the stall, completely sterilized and demagnetized.

Chief Petty Officer Mendez, the high-ranking officer charged with the duty of training the young recruit, watched as Sylvain placed his black combat boots on his feet and began to secure them.

What seemed like a lifetime ago, Mendez was the one who had trained the first set of Spartan-II candidates. With his strict schedules, perfectly planned exercises, and respect-instilling demeanor, those soldiers of might had earned a spectacular war-career record within United Nations Space Command's history. But each of them were children. Each of them were undisciplined, young, weak, and inexperienced.

He vaguely recalled one certain Spartan candidate who had learned the

value of teamwork, the hard way, on his very first day of training: Spartan-117. The trainee's name was forever lost in the vast archives of Mendez's overloaded subconscious.

But now, decades later, he was training a former rebellion faction soldier, already introduced to the action of live combat and tactics. At the age of twenty-four, he had the abilities that Marine regulars could only wish to attain. It wasn't a standard Section Three mystery as to why Mendez had been placed with the responsibility of training him in the standard UNSC fashions of combat.

Trainee Reno had finished tying his boots up in 6.79 seconds. His fingers and hands were a blur of speedy motions. Upon finishing, he stood up with perfect posture, and snapped off a crisp salute to his CPO.

"Same drill as yesterday, Reno!" Mendez ordered in a firm tone. "On the grass in ten seconds!"

Sylvain replied, "Sir, yes, sir!" and marched out of the dimly lit barracks, and onto the verdant training grounds. Mendez followed behind him.

Morning calisthenics had gone through and was completed. Jumping jacks, push-ups, sit-ups, pull-ups, and squats had not slowed Trainee Reno down one bit. By the final exercise, leg lifts, Mendez found himself sweating, panting, and desperately trying (but failing) to keep pace with his trainee. How could he have turned into such an old man so soon?

Sylvain stood as straight and perfect as he could, as Mendez was doubled-over with exhaustion. Between hoarse gasps for breath, the CPO managed out, "Jog to the Naval Officer's Academy for strategy training." Soon, Mendez was back with half of his composure. "I believe that you know the way," he assumed as he gave a somnolent grin.

Sylvain replied, "Sir, yes, sir!" His hands were clasped against his thighs, and he looked straight ahead of him. He hated this, but if it was what he had to do to fight Covenant, then so be it.

"Well, then, get moving, trainee!" Mendez roared with a small smile. He watched as Sylvain broke into a paced sprint. In mere seconds, his red beret disappeared from behind a small hill. Mendez would take an LRV to the Academy today. His muscles ached, but the sense of pride he received for training, or at least attempting, that young man pushed the incapacitating stinging aside.

The three-kilometer run from the barracks was always something Sylvain enjoyed every last second of. It gave him that feeling that he wasn't apart of the UNSC, and the Covenant were still hidden in the shroud of space, unknown to mankind. It allowed him the time for introspection, to reflect upon himself, and order his thoughts together. Was he a good soldier, UNSC or not? Of course he was. Had he made the right decisions in his life? Of course he did. He wanted to fight the Covenant, and now, though in the uniform of a UNSC Marine, he would be doing so. Sometimes he slowed his jogging pace, trying to elongate the time he had to himself. But Mendez was always behind him, keeping the pace. And there was no doubt in his mind that he was standing on the Academy stone steps, timing him. If he wasn't,

his AI class instructor, Gala, certainly was.

The twenty-five steps of the Naval Officers had been quite the ordeal for the already fatigued CPO. Each step felt like a bound. But Sylvain had jogged right up them in eight seconds flat. He was fast. When he arrived as expected, both the CPO and Gala were awaiting his appearance.

"Hello, and good morning Trainee Sylvain Reno," Gala greeting warmly. She had always called him by his full and complete name, but it didn't annoy him. If it had, there was no way he could succeed in stopping it.

"Good morning," he answered back politely. Gala smiled to him, turned, and stepped inside of the Academy, the motes of light she produced illuminating the dark interior. Sylvain nodded to CPO Mendez, and followed his AI instructor.

Gala's class was a rather peculiar one. Normally, the trainees are required to be taught many forms of complex math, chemistry, biology, and history, all merging to form one very dangerous soldier. However, Sylvain had not been subjected to those types of lessons, since pre-screenings had proven that he had a very good understanding and knowledge of the fields. It was odd, especially for a former rebellion faction member. The other soldiers the UNSC had recovered/captured during that fateful afternoon, many of whom already MIA or KIA, were dumb to say the least. They only knew how to fight, and take orders. Sylvain, on the other hand, expanded his knowledge somehow. Gala instead had given him holographic views and scenes of mock-battles against the Covenant, and, without any sort of warning, would ask him what his decisions would be as commanding officer. It was all hypothetical and simulation, but the UNSC had integrated many new programs to replicate a real life battlefield down to the gore. His personal feelings on the situation, evaluation of the yields of success and the losses of failure, and his final decision would all be recorded and graded.

"Before we begin today's practice sim," Gala spoke in her calming, resonant voice, "please insert the ADR Brainwave monitor into your implants. We cannot grade you if we do not know what you are thinking."

Sylvain snatched the ADR monitor plug from the arm of his seat, and carefully inserted the receiver prong into the small implant out-port hidden behind his right earlobe. Almost instantly, a staff of Section Three scientists and a collective of officers from the Office of Naval Intelligence, about twenty-five kilometers away from the Reach Training Facility could practically read his mind. Each activity, no matter how irrelevant, would be recorded for later study. No anomalies so far.

Gala cleared her artificial throat, but Sylvain knew she did it to sound respectable. AI's did not have to breathe.

"Now, Sylvain, I want you to clear your mind of all thoughts," she requested. Sylvain did his best to stop his brain from chattering wildly; incorporating slow-breathing techniques that Mendez had taught him. When Gala detected minimal activity of brainwaves and thoughts, the ambient lighting dimmed, and her glowing body reduced light energy by 65 percent. A holographic battlefield appeared in the

middle of the room, illuminating the walls beyond.

Before Gala could even get a single word out, Sylvain's mind bombarded her monitoring systems with lighting-fast precision. He quickly took into account everything that lay before him, his fiery blue eyes wide open, and darting between every nuance of the simulation. Two Pelican drop-ships were positioned behind a somewhat large hill at the six of a twenty-troop squad, marked Red team. Another troop with thirty-five Marines were positioned just east of Red team 200 meters away. They were tagged as Blue team. A Covenant drop-ship, which normally could hold about seventy-five soldiers, was descending from orbit, and would make a landing at an area marked as Navpoint Beta, four kilometers away from Red and Blue teams. Navpoint Beta was located just ten meters of slightly elevated forests to the north. That was the information displayed, but Sylvain would require more.

"What is the objective of this mission?" He asked Gala, enthusiasm in his tone of voice. This was his favourite segment of training. He adored tactics and strategies. It was always like a game.

"The objective," Gala informed, "is to destroy the approaching Covenant force."

Of course. Was it really necessary to ask? That was always the mission objective: Covenant destruction of mass proportions. But more information was necessary to make an educated plan of action over the situation. "Weapons check of teams Red and Blue."

Sylvain watched as his mission timer dropped from 10:00 minutes to 09:25 before freezing. If he were in command, a thirty-five weapons and equipment check of fifty-five Marines would be unacceptable. But that wasn't what he would be worrying about. He needed to focus. The lives of holographic soldiers and an invisible victory depended on his resolve.

Artificial soldiers' voices echoed in his ears via the implant connection. "Red team reporting that each soldier is carrying an MA5B assault rifle, three ammo clips, and an M8D sidearm, two ammo clips, sir!"

Another voice sounded. "Blue team reporting that our Marines are carrying an MA5B assault rifle each, three ammo clips, and an M8D sidearm, two ammo clips, sir! But one soldier is carrying a Jackhammer rocket launcher with only one rocket, and we also have three Warthogs with a cache of 300 incendiary grenades!"

Incendiary grenades had been proven completely worthless against the energy shields of the Elite Covenant warriors, and were hardly ever used any more. Why did they come with that?

But it was valuable data nonetheless. Sylvain began to play out many different designs in his head, and Section Three and ONI quickly committed each to databases designated specifically to Sylvain Reno.

In the recorded time of eleven minutes and thirty eight point zero seconds, Sylvain had finally decided on a course of action. Gala listened closely, and registered everything as well. She would relay his commands.

"Teams Red and Blue move out on foot while blue team members utilize the Warthogs. The soldier equipped with the launcher must be with them. The Pelicans begin to fly to the opposite ends of the forests, avoiding the Covenant drop-ships' trajectory of descent and landing. The Pelicans wait on the ground beyond the forests. When Blue team's Warthogs arrive at Navpoint Beta, they immediately begin planting the incendiary grenades underneath the dirt, following a typical spider web pattern, only more concentrated on the point where the drop-ship is supposed to land. By then, Red and Blue teams should have arrived, and taken positions inside the forests with a clear sight of the Covenant's LZ. When the grenades are placed, the Marines of Blue team back away, and join the others in the cover of the forest. Jackhammer unit should be aiming exactly at the center of the incendiary grenade placements. At 00:01 remaining time, he will fire at the grenades, igniting them. The blast of the grenades should destroy the drop-ship effectively, and any enemy soldiers that might have attempting escape. The MA5B units mop up any remainder of the Covenant troops. When all are defeated, they pass through the forests heading north, board the landed Pelicans, and exit the battlefield. I estimate a total of zero casualties of the UNSC Marines." Sylvain gave a sly smirk to Gala when he finished.

"Quite a bold estimate, Trainee Sylvain Reno," she defiantly murmured. "And quite a bold mission plan. Is that your final decision?"

Sylvain, that smirk not leaving his expression, declared, "Yes. Now, begin the simulation, please."

In less than a nanosecond, Gala assigned all specified orders to each of the simulation soldiers, and they responded with to Sylvain with a morale filled, "Yes, sir!" And each marine proceeded to exactly where they were commanded to be.

Sylvain watched as the tiny soldiers of blue team drive the LRV Warthog over to the Navpoint, the mini-engine whining with a bit of wear and tear. Red team sprinted as fast as they could, and were making excellent time for standard Marines. He quickly eyed the mission timer. There were seven minutes twenty three seconds left. Plenty of time.

At four minutes twenty seconds, the LRV unit was putting the finishing touches on the grenade snare. Immediately after they finished, they joined their comrades in the edge of the forest, and the Jackhammer Marine reported that he was ready to fire.

Four minutes elapsed, and the Covenant drop-ship floated ten centimeters above the grassy surface. As soon as it's mandible-esque fuselage hinges opened, and a large collection of Elites, Jackals, and Grunts were about to debark their ship, the catalyst rocket blasted out of the woodland terrain, and lit up the ground booby-trap. Flames surged upward as the hazardous chemicals were detonated in a makeshift fashion. Parts of the drop-ship, including it's boosters, were melted and singed away from it's exposed belly. The enemy units were ablaze, and Elites rolled about on the ground, hoping to extinguish the fires on their combat harnesses. The hidden Marines filled the air with lead to exterminate the cooked Covenant. A lucky bullet had collided with a Grunt's methane breath tank unit, and the gas had instantly turned the small campfire into a

fifteen-meter barbecue. If there were any enemy survivors, they were neutralized now. The charred drop-ship sputtered, and plummeted into the bodies of it's released soldiers.

Every single member of the Red and Blue teams cheered, and made their way through the thick forests with ease, boarded the Pelicans, and escaped the battlefield.

Instantly, Sylvain's final statistics were displayed onto the hologram, floating above the battlefield as it slowly faded away. A smile curved his lips as he read his score with satisfaction.

\*\*STRATEGIC BATTLE SIMULATOR MISSION #25VB.\*\*

\*\*SUBJECT: TRAINEE SYLVAIN RENO.\*\*

\*\*FINAL SCORE:\*\*

\*\*UNSC CASUALTY TOTAL: 00\*\*

\*\*COVENANT CASUALTY TOTAL: 75\*\*

\*\*SOLDIER COMMAND EFFICIENCY: 97.2\*\*

\*\*EQUIPMENT USAGE EFFICIENCY: 89.9\*\*

\*\*ATTACK PLAN EFFICIENCY: 98.0\*\*

\*\*ESCAPE PLAN EFFICIENCY: 100.0\*\*

\*\*GALA'S FINAL SCORE: 99\*\*

\*\*ONI'S FINAL SCORE: 97\*\*

\*\*EVALUATION: 98\*\*

The score faded into nothing, and the lights had returned to 100 percent illumination. Gala had also increased her light energy output by 65 percent, and she clapped her "hands." "Outstanding, Sylvain. Personally, I am quite impressed!"

Sylvain laughed out loud as he removed his ADR Brainwave monitor from his implant port, and replaced it on the arm of his seat. "Is that the first time an AI has been impressed by the tactics of an organic human being?"

Gala shook her head. "The answer to that inquiry is completely irrelevant, Sylvain," she gently scolded. "But ONI is also very impressed by your success. This training simulator is red-flagged as a level 10 difficulty rating."

Sylvain liked the sound of that. A level 10 difficulty rating? That was as hard and as tough as they came. Had he slipped up with a command, or changed it around, it would probably result into a holographic human catastrophe.

"ONI is requesting you to report to the shuttle bays for transport to Reach Military Command Complex Three," Gala informed. "It seems that you have graduated, Sylvain Reno."

"Graduation?" Sylvain repeated. He must have been right on the line of that goal, and the last training simulation must have pushed him well over the line.

He was going to miss the training routines, Chief Petty Officer Mendez, the tactic training simulations, and Gala. But he had to go. He had to fight.

"It has been a pleasure to have a student as gifted as you, Sylvain Reno." Gala's voice had a hint of sorrow in it. She must have been sad to see him leave.

"The pleasure, Gala," Sylvain grinned, "was mine." And Sylvain stepped out of her classroom for the very last time.

Outside, CPO Mendez was leaning against an LRV, smiling proudly. He must have received the transmission as well.

"Need a ride, kid?" he asked, still grinning a set of perfect white teeth.

Sylvain smiled back, adjusted his red beret, and replied, "Think you can drive double-time to the shuttle bays? I can't afford to be late, and I would hate to blame the guy who taught me that promptness is everything."

Mendez laughed, and answered, "I beat you here, didn't I?"

### 3. Chapter 3: For Craft, I will do this

**\*\*From Sir\*\*** **\*\*Gabriel:\*\*** \_To create a better scene of Mendez and Sylvain's last moment together, I erased the idea of Sylvain arriving to the shuttle-bays, and instead had Mendez drive him directly to the Reach Military Complex. Unfortunately, I had published the previous chapter before I had noticed my error. To conclude, ignore the shuttle-bay dialogue, and replace it with the Reach Military Complex. I am sorry in advance for any confusion this might cause. Also, a lot of credit goes to Eric Nylund for the details of the augmentation processes. Without him, most of this chapter and future chapters could not be reality. Thanks for making two stellar books, E.N!\_

\* \* \*

><strong>1600 Hours, April 5, 2551 (Military Calendar)</strong>

**\*\*Epsilon Eridani System, Reach Military Complex,\*\***

**\*\*Complex Three, Planet Reach.\*\***

As the Chief Petty Officer dropped him off in the front of Complex Three, Sylvain snapped off a salute to his former instructor and physical trainer. Instead of returning the regulation-style salute to his graduate, Mendez thrust out his steely open hand out toward Sylvain.

Sylvain looked down at his gloved hand. The CPO must have been tired of saluting, and he wanted to show his pride for the capable soldier with a friendly handshake. He looked back up to meet Mendez's gray

eyes, grinned, and firmly shook his hand.

"It's been an honour, Sylvain," Mendez exclaimed with sincerity. That was the very first time the CPO had called him by his name, instead of "trainee."

"Likewise, Mendez," Sylvain replied. And that was the first time Sylvain had every called him by his name, without adding "Chief Petty Officer," "CPO," or "Sir."

Mendez, with a feeling of respect for the young, cold fire-eyed soldier, muttered, "Goodbye and good luck, warrior." He hit the throttle of his LRV, and sped off over the hilly dirt road. When he turned his head behind him to get a last glimpse of his talented trainee, Sylvain was waving "farewell," to him.

That was the last time they would ever see each other again.

The outside of the Reach Military Complex was almost frightening, sending chills of fear up Sylvain's spine. It was not for the reason of its physical appearance; it looked exactly like every other military complex building. Cold, gray and white, sterile, pristine, and very, very professional. But Sylvain knew what went on inside of those thick walls.

Mainline Navy Personnel of the UNSC elevated members of ONI to near-mythological ranks. The main staff of the Section Three consisted mostly of scientists, and medical doctors, all with proper degrees and credentials to certify that they are the best minds in their fields. They worked on top-secret UNSC and ONI projects, trying to discover a possible opportunity to turn the tide of the Human-Covenant war in the Earth's favour.

But Sylvain knew of one certain development that went on within that building, and the certain spearheading witch of a woman: The Spartan-II Program, directed by Dr. Catherine Halsey.

Sylvain had heard a decent amount of the Spartan-II Program. Six years ago, when Sylvain was still training with the rebellion faction on Craft, a successful spying mission had been completed, and had recovered a wealth of information and data regarding the United Nations Space Command's secret weapon against the Covenant. It had began back in 2517, when a group of seventy-five children were selected specifically for the program. They were abducted in their sleep from their homes, trained extensively in combat arts, exercise, and academic studies. They had all been normal boys and girls until March 10, 2525, when their augmentations were set into gruesome effect.

Each child had material bone grafting, muscular enhancement injections, thyroid implants, occipital capillary reversal operations, and neural dendrite superconducting shields all placed or performed on them. Halsey wanted to create the fastest, strongest, and smartest warriors the UNSC had ever seen.

But there were serious repercussions to her ambitions. A total of thirty of the children had perished during the augmentation operations and processes; a term Halsey used to describe their deaths was "washed out." Twelve children had suffered side effects such as Parkinson's disease, bone pulverization and twisting, and permanent



blindness. Only thirty-two of the young candidates had survived without being disabled or killed.

The more Sylvain thought about it was he stepped through the pre-entrance sterilizer and electric neutralizer, the more it hurt him to remember his war actions against a Spartan-II a long time ago. He tried urgently to forget about that day of terrible victory. Those resistance days were over. If he got out of this war alive, maybe he would start it back up again. But not now. Right now, he had a job to do: pay back those Covenant bastards for destroying his home planet.

As Sylvain trotted around the decoration-less lobby of the Section Three Complex, an officer wearing a neatly pressed black uniform stepped up to him, his eyes trained upon Sylvain as if he had been expecting his arrival for quite some time.

Sylvain checked the man's black enameled bars on his breast as they shimmered in the ambient lighting. He was a Lieutenant.

"Sir!" Sylvain quickly straightened his back at attention, and saluted.

"At ease," the Lieutenant said. His voice was firm, and strong. "Trainee Sylvain Reno?"

Sylvain answered back, "Sir, yes, sir!"

"Walk with me, young man," the Lieutenant ordered. He then turned on his heel, and trotted down the long, winding corridor from which he had first come. Sylvain followed right behind him.

This was completely unfamiliar territory. Never had Sylvain been inside of the Section Three Complex hallways, or anyone he had known besides Chief Petty Officer Mendez. Worry raced through his sharp mind. The unknown was waiting ahead, and anything imaginable could occur within these immaculate yet invisibly sullied and stained walls. \_If only they could speak, \_Sylvain thought.

The Lieutenant opened a door, and motioned for Sylvain to enter the room. Sylvain walked in, and the door was closed behind him. Inside was a woman seated at a collection of large computer consoles with her back turned to him. She had long, gray hair, and seemed to be a little aged. She was talking with an AI, one Sylvain had never seen before. During the courses of his extensive training, Sylvain had met with and spoken to a vast assortment of AI's. He liked how they each possessed their own personalities, as if they were human. But the one on the desk lookedâ€¦ different to him.

The AI was female. She had a slender "body," form, and a bright lavender coloured skin. She had a cropped slightly short "hair" style, Lines of code and calculations streamed, traveled, and blinked in a vertical motion pattern on her glowing "body."

Sylvain would not dare interrupt, nor would he even listen. He didn't want to listen. These Section Three spooks were exactly like fortune-tellers to Sylvain. They would give him a mission, and "guesstimate" the outcome. Eighty percent of the time, their hypotheses were actually correct.

Minutes passed, and neither of them had paid him any attention. Snuffing the irritation welling inside of his brash mind, he gently tapped the doorjamb with two knuckles. First the AI glanced at him, her expressions quite aggravated. But she must have identified him as scheduled to arrive. The look transitioned to an indifferent one.

Then, the gray haired woman slowly turned about, and, from behind a pair of thick-framed glasses chained around her neck, her icy-blue eyes met his fiery ones.

"Ahh, you must be the trainee, Sylvain Reno, yes?" the woman asked. Her voice had a bit of an air of superiority.

Sylvain replied calmly, "Yes, ma'am."

The woman stood from her seat, and smiled a little at him. "Pleased to meet you."

The AI hopped to her "feet," and began inspecting the trainee. "A perfect genetic match with required genetics?" She questioned. "That's extremely unusual, and he is much, much older than the others were."

Genetic match? Others? What was the AI talking about, Sylvain wondered.

"That's enough, Cortana," the woman said after raising her hand.

"Well," Cortana murmured as her skin tone changed to a slight blue, "it's good to meet the prodigy."

This only confused Sylvain more. Prodigy?

The woman cleared her throat, and said, "My name is Dr. Catherine Halsey."

Just the introductions had made Sylvain's blood boil. He was standing in front of that monster of a woman who transformed a bunch of innocent children into unnatural, cold-blooded killing machines. She was the devious mastermind behind it all. She was the one who coined that awful phrase, "washed out." Sylvain wanted to scream at her until he suffered a fatal heart attack, but he remained silent, and nonchalant. But his rage grew and grew.

She grinned at Sylvain again, and asked, "I'll bet you are wondering why you are here."

Sylvain tried to squelch any tone of pure wrath and hatred in his voice, and managed out shakily, "Yes, ma'am."

Halsey placed her hands upon her hips. "Are you aware of the Spartan-II program?" she asked.

The desire to shout out everything he felt about the Spartan-II program surged through his brain, but he stifled it out. "Yes, ma'am. I am aware of a rather large amount of that program."

Sylvain had almost referred to the program as a "sinister deed," but

he had caught himself before uttering it. He hoped Cortana would not detect his quickly spiking blood pressure.

"Well, Sylvain," Halsey muttered grimly, "What you may not know is that forty two Spartan-II candidates had either perished, or suffered advanced side-effects. Only thirty were combat ready."

"And since 2525, three have been reported KIA, and one has been reported MIA. He didn't come back. The number of Spartan-II's is a mere twenty-six out of the seventy-five I intended to have. But it is not possible to train another."

Sylvain became even angrier as she gave her own story from her own perception. It was cold, calculating, and evil, showing absolutely no regard for the children she abducted and murdered with her demonic plots.

Unforgivable.

"That is why," Halsey sighed, "Section Three will be initiating the Spartan-III project. And after crosschecking a numerous amount of candidates, UNSC and civilian, we chose the best match for certain genetic markers. There is only one single candidate, and that is you, Sylvain Reno of Craft.

A Spartan-III program? As devious and dark as it may have seemed, and these were trying times for humanity itself, Sylvain had truthfully considered the notion of becoming a Spartan.

The memory of slaying the Spartan on Craft had replayed in his mind again. He could repay his debt to the others by joining them in combat. It was the least he could do for them, after killing one of theirs who had gone through so much already.

"For the Spartan-III candidates," Halsey informed, "we did not afford them the luxury of deciding if they wanted to be Spartans or not. However, Sylvain, you may."

Sylvain could feel the skin on his face becoming hotter and hotter. Small pricks of sweat appeared from under his beret as he tried his hardest to repress the sheer, blind rage that screamed for sweet freedom. They would allow a twenty-four year old adult to decide, but not six-year-old children to?

Despicable.

But it was such a great idea. Sylvain could more effectively combat the dreaded Covenant forces, and repay his unofficial debt to the compatriots of the Spartan he had once killed on the battlefield. After deliberation, and a little bit of verbal coercing from Halsey and Cortana, Sylvain had reluctantly agreed.

"For Craft, I will do this."

May God have mercy on my soul, he thought to himself.

But no matter what Dr. Catherine Halsey ever did during the rest of her life, she could never redeem herself in the eyes of Sylvain Reno.

Never.

#### 4. Chapter 4: Chance

**\*\*2300 Hours, April 9, 2551. (Military Calendar)\*\***

**\*\*Epsilon Eridani System, Reach Military Complex Three,\*\***

**\*\*Planet Reach.\*\***

UNITED NATIONS SPACE COMMAND PRIORITY  
TRANSMISSION

25399H-27

ENCRYPTION CODE: Red

PUBLIC KEY: file/excised access Omega

FROM: Admiral Ysionris Jeromi, Chief Medical Officer,

UNSC Research Station \_Hopeful\_.

TO: Dr. Catherine Elizabeth Halsey, M.D., Ph.D.,

special civilian consultant (civilian identification #:  
10141-026-SRB4695)

SUBJECT: Experimental procedure biological risks for subject: RENO,  
SYLVAIN.

CLASSIFICATION: RESTRICTED. (BGX Directive)

/start file/

Catherine,

Exactly what are you Section Three fools doing? Twenty-six years ago, you queried my team and I for identical risks. Is this another one of your "hypothetical studies?"

You murdered thirty children, and damned twelve to miserable lives inside neutral-buoyancy tanks and wheel chairs. And now you want to do it again?

I have attached our findings in Sylvain Reno's case as a warning. But to you, it's just another factor of experiment failure. I want to go on the record as strongly disagreeing with you and your absolutely heinous actions, but I follow orders.

Don't ask me for any more favours. I refuse to go to hell with you.

y.j.

Press ENTER to open linked document attachments.

Synopsis of chemical/biological risks.

Carbide ceramic ossification: advanced material grafting onto skeletal structures to make bones virtually unbreakable. Recommended coverage not to exceed 3 percent total bone mass because of significant white blood cell necrosis.

Subject RENO, SYLVAIN: Risks nullified.

Muscular Enhancement Injections: protein complex is injected intramuscularly to increase tissue density and decrease lactase recovery time.

Subject RENO, SYLVAIN: 3 percent event of fatal cardiac volume increase.

Catalytic Thyroid Implant: Platinum pellet containing human growth hormone catalyst is implanted in the thyroid gland to boost growth of skeletal and muscle tissues.

Subject RENO, SYLVAIN: Complete bone marrow failure.

Occipital Capillary Reversal: Submergence and boosted blood vessel flow beneath the rods and cones of subject's retina. Produces a marked visual perception increase.

Subject RENO, SYLVAIN: Retinal rejection and detachment. Permanent blindness.

Superconducting fibrification of neural dendrites: Alteration of bioelectrical nerve transduction to shielded electronic transduction. Three hundred percent increase in subject's reflexes. Anecdotal evidence of marked increase in intelligence, memory, and creativity.

Subject RENO, SYLVAIN: Risk of Parkinson's disease and Fletcher's Syndrome.

/end file/

Dr. Halsey grimaced at the all too familiar dangers and risks for Sylvain. His survival and effectiveness depended solely on chance.

And Halsey did not believe in luck.

They would begin the augmentation process tomorrow.

Perhaps the fate of humanity rested upon this project.

## 5. Chapter 5: Spartan300

0600 Hours, June 3, 2551 (Military Calendar)/

**\*\*Epsilon Eridani System, Reach Military Complex Three,\*\***

**\*\*Planet Reach.\*\***

Sylvain awoke with a warm feeling dripping down to his nose.

He had been forced to live inside the Military Complex Three for what

a group of doctors and men in white coats referred to as, "observation." Since then, he had been kept in a 10 x 10 bunker room, coloured a drab dark green, complete with his own small shower stall, toilet, and a washbasin and mirror.

Without even touching the warm liquid sensation, he quickly shot out of his bed, and inspected his face.

A slow trickle of blood began to bleed out of his eye socket, and dripped off of his cheek, into the washbasin below, leaving a crimson stain.

Sylvain pounded the bottoms of his clenched fists against the edges of the basin clumsily. It cracked a little as the flimsy porcelain was no match for his enhanced muscles.

\_What did that wicked doctor do to me\_, he thought over and over. \_Why did I agree to this project? What was I thinking? I'll be a statistic number just like those poor dead children. I've got to pay the Covenant back. I'll get that witch of a doctor if it's the very last thing that I do!\_

His mind was losing its pace and sanity with so many thoughts at once. He was going so fast, he could barely keep up himself. Was it another one of those augmentations? It had to be. He could never think so fast before. And with each thought that came to him had a very unfamiliar, and cold feel to them, almost as if the notions weren't his own.

He began to think of his old friends within the resistance, in particular, Corporal Stange and Field Commander Hansen.

Hansen was lost forever, but Stange had enjoyed a very successful career within the UNSC ranks. In the months he had spent battling the Covenant under the UNSC banners, he had taken many missions. Sylvain had heard that he has received a pair of Purple Hearts, and a promotion to his dream position: Major First Class. He had displayed a keen ability to lead his troops into battles as furious as the very fires of hell, and come back with a minimal number of casualties. High Command desired to place him in command of the infamous 105th Platoon, the Orbital Drop Shock Troops (ODSTs) or, as they were much better acknowledged and referred to as, "Helljumpers." They were so brutal during combat, and outside, they were feared by their fellow soldiers of lesser units. But Major Silva had the 105th Platoon. If he ever were to kick the bucket, Stange would be there to take over in an instant. The two had become fast friends, actually, but that was irrelevant information not recorded.

Sylvain wondered, what would Stange think of him, now? What would the seasoned soldier, now his superiour officer, say as he lay there in a shaking ball upon the floor? "You're a disgrace!" Sylvain could hear his friend and compatriot boom in a furious manner. "I can't believe that I saluted to you!" Every thought shook and rattled the frightened Spartan even more. "You were once a human, but now you are a freak! A disgusting, putrid freak!" Stange's voice thundered in his mind.

Sylvain pleaded back to the hallucinations in his mind, and he whispered over and over, "Forgive me, Jimâ€¦ please, please, forgive me!" Every time he repeated it, his voice grew louder, until he

screamed in a kneeling position, his head tilted toward the ceiling, "FORGIVE ME, STANGE!" And then, he slumped onto his side, huddled into a trembling ball, and covered his still bleeding eyes as he whimpered softly.

Dr. Halsey and a slew of hand-selected doctors had been watching his every move since he was sleeping, listening to his pleading to his own imagination.

One doctor had asked, "Stange? Who is that?"

Halsey turned to the doctor, removed her glasses from her eyes, and replied, "Jim Stange is a Major in the UNSC Marine Corps, and was apart of the very same resistance organization that Sylvain had come from. As a matter of fact, I believe that both of them were transported in the same Pelican that recovered them from Craft, in the Lambda Serpentis System."

The doctor had immediately realized who Jim Stange was now. "So," the doctor asked, "what do you think we should do? A few more days in that condition, and our Spartan-III will be a complete gibbering mental case. His sanity is slowly slipping away from us."

Halsey replaced her glasses, and glanced down at Sylvain through the holographic ceiling that was his room's roof. "Simple," she answered. "We bring Major Stange here for a visit."

1330 Hours, June 3, 2551 (Military Calendar)/

**\*\*Epsilon Eridani System, Reach Military Complex Three,\*\***

**\*\*Planet Reach.\*\***

Sylvain had calmed down since his eyes had ceased their bleeding. But the thought of Hansen and Stange had caused a very noticeable spike in his blood pressure. Halsey had called the respectable Major five hours ago. At the time, he was in a debriefing, but he would be arriving shortly. Halsey hypothesized what Spartan-300's reaction would be when he was reunited with his old long-lost friend.

The bed had felt very comfortable to Sylvain tired and aching bones, but he could not fall asleep even if he had wanted to. His mind was working overtime, attempting to re-learn and become accustomed to the new modifications that he had been subjected to. But what had happened to the morning exercises? He hadn't gone to the gym all day. Someone was going to show up in his room, making sure that he was okay, making sure that he was still alive.

Just as predicted, a white-coated and name-tagged doctor opened the door, and stepped in. Only this time, a pair of burly Marines accompanied him.

The doctor flicked Sylvain a phony smile, and asked, "How are you feeling today, Sylvain?"

Did he have to ask? It only made him feel worse. He felt like he did yesterday, and the day before that, and so on. He felt like shit, pure and simple.

Sylvain managed to speak as his head pounded like thunder. "I can't

move or walk without falling down, my head hurts, and my eyes were bleeding this morning."

The doctor answered back, "Those are good signs, Sylvain."

How could those be good signs? Sylvain felt as if he was going to die every single minute of each restless day and each sleepless night. He felt so useless. He felt so worthless. He had betrayed his own morals, and he had killed for those morals. He sometimes wished to die. But he didn't deserve death. He deserved to suffer.

"Come with me, Sylvain. We have a surprise for you," the doctor hinted with his emotionless voice.

Sylvain clumsily swung his legs to the edge of his bed, and attempted to stand up, but just as he had gained balance on his feet, both legs had gave way to his weight, and his body tumbled forward. He was going to fall.

The two big Marines snagged Sylvain out from his fall, and helped him to stand, groaning all the way. Had they been an iota weaker, the Marines would fall down along with him. They wordlessly threw his limp arms over their shoulders, and helped him to stay upon his feet, and stand erect. "Thank you," he mumbled.

The doctor left the room, and the Marines followed with Sylvain. He practically had to drag his feet against the floor. Unusually chilled, he inspected his torso, and realized that he was not wearing any upper garments. He suddenly remembered removing his shirt four hours, sixteen minutes, and forty-five seconds ago. He turned to his bed, and murmured, "My shirtâ€¦"

The doctor turned to face him, and said, "Don't worry, Sylvain. It's all right."

They continued down the cold, steel hallways, guiding Sylvain to his "surprise."

He was brought into a small room, and seated in front of a plate of bulletproof glass. To him, he felt like a prisoner talking to someone on the outside, but the black sheath had not been pulled yet. The doctor and the Marines had left the small room. As soon as the door closed, the black sheath was raised toward the ceiling, and Sylvain had recognized the man sitting before him.

A crisp olive military jacket, medals, citations, and campaign ribbons decorated his chest. He had a thick, muscular neck, a spiky mustache and beard, piercing black eyes, a sharp nose, and crew-cut brown hair. It was Major Jim Stange.

Sylvain quickly saluted, hurting his forehead and hand in the process.

"There's no need for that, son," Stange's voice was still strong and confident, albeit slightly raspy. "I'm just really happy to see that you're still in one piece."

Sylvain could not say a single word. Stange didn't seem angry at all, and that worried him.



"I heard that you were talking about me. Is everything okay? Are you all right?"

Sylvain wanted to say that he was sorry that he had completely turned his back on the resistance. That he had allowed himself to be unnaturally altered. That he was guilty of treason. He wanted desperately to, but the words just wouldn't come out. Instead, all he could force out was, "I am augmented."

The Major didn't get angry, he didn't get red-faced, and he didn't raise his voice. Instead, he grinned, and replied, "So I have read and heard."

Sylvain groaned loudly, and asked, "Aren't you ashamed of me? Aren't you angry at what I have become? I'mâ€¦ a killing machine, a Goddamned killing machine. I'm no better than the Covenant."

Stange looked at him square in the eye. Those fires in his eyes were burning hotter than they ever had.

"Sylvain, you are not a machine," he calmly stated. "When you recover, you'll be a fighter, a damned good one, I might add. Hell, you were one of the best soldiers I have ever seen in my life. You're fearless, bold, and smart. Now, imagine those qualities of yours multiplied by ten. That is you, now."

Sylvain looked to the floor in contempt of himself. "But sir, I, we, were apart of a rebel faction. We fought against practices such as this that has been done to me. And I agreed to it. I agreed! I turned my back on all of our fallen brothers in arms."

Stange became agitated. He slammed his fist against the oak of his side of the table and shouted, Sylvain, those fallen soldiers may have hated the UNSC, but they loved the human race. Now, it faces total extinction at the claws of some alien scum on a fanatic crusade! If anything, they would approve of your augmentations, and probably would have followed you had they the chance! You and the other Spartans can make a drastic change in our losing war, and the soldiers would be proud of that! Damned proud! Can't you see? Look at me, Sylvain. That is an order."

Sylvain's eyes met Stange's. Sylvain was shaking.

"Choosing to become the only Spartan-III was the right answer. I don't know of any soldier or Marine or human being more worthy to becoming a Spartan-III. You're a helluva hard-core soldier, son. Survive, and become the best."

Sylvain's lips trembled, and curled into a smile. As he always was, Stange was one hundred and ten percent right. He had told him to press on. And damn it, Sylvain would. "Thank youâ€¦ so much, sir."

Stage grinned, placed his military hat upon his head, stood, saluted, and said, "I'll see you in a month."

As Stange left, Sylvain saluted him back.

Sylvain would survive. He would be the best.

## 6. Chapter 6: Calibrations

**\*\*From Sir Gabriel:\*\*** \_This chapter was inspired a lot by a scene in the novels. Just giving credit to other authors when credit is due. Also, be sure to keep track of the dates of each chapter.\_

\* \* \*

><strong>1500 Hours, June 17, 2551 (Military Calendar) Epsilon Eridani System, Reach Military Complex Three,\*\*

**\*\*Planet Reach\*\***

Sylvain stretched out every single muscle in his body before he commenced his exercise routines. The entire gym was empty as it always was. It was almost as if the gym had been installed personally for him. But then again, he was the only Spartan-III.

After two hundred push-ups, sit-ups, deep squat thrusts, and chin-ups, he finally felt warmed up. Months ago, after such strenuous activities, he would be susceptible to losing consciousness over exhaustion. Those muscle enhancement augmentations certainly do pull their weight, he thought.

He approached the body sized punching bag as it hung lazily from the ceiling, and set it's weight to two hundred pounds; the weight of an average human being. Sylvain pulled his right clenched fist back, tensed his arm and hand muscles, and pounded the bag with a full-knuckle forward lunging punch.

The bag pitched forward from his strike, almost knocking over a treadmill behind it. Something was wrong with its current setting. Sylvain caught it with one hand on its forward swing toward him, and allowed it to hang as it did before. He stepped to the weight-setting console, and increased the punching bag to four hundred pounds, the statistical weight of a standard Covenant Elite.

He gave it another testing punch, and again, it swung a little too far for his normal strength. The chains that suspended it rattled, disturbed again by the much more powerful smack.

Was the weight setting console malfunctioning? He gave it a quick check, and indeed, it was set to four hundred pounds even.

After switching the weight to six hundred and fifty pounds, he gave it another test punch, using the same amount of force that he had for the last two tests.

The bag teetered forward just a little before returning to its idle hanging position. That was about right, now.

With the bag calibrated to the correct setting, Sylvain let loose a flurry of lightning-fast punches and kicks for a full forty-five minutes, not stopping or slowing down for a break at all.

After that, he stepped up to the treadmill, and set the speed to twenty KMPH. He ran as fast as he could, but he nearly fell off over the front handles. He increased the speed to forty KMPH, but it was still way too slow. He knocked it up to sixty-five. That felt about

right. He jogged for an hour and a half before stopping.

Sylvain used every machine he could fit time in for: weight lifting, stair climbing, long dot drills, and bench pressing. But every machine required its settings to be increased. It seemed that everything in the gym was broken.

He left the gym, confused. Why was everything like that? Because of the augmentations?

The firing range was next on his daily agenda. He had a lot more activities of training left to go before he could call it day. Training was a duty that he had to perform, and he would always perform his duties.

But he was also feeling a lot better, and he was thinking a lot better about himself. That alone made his day, his week, and his year.

\_The Covenant better be ready\_, he thought, \_because Sylvain Reno is coming back!\_

## 7. Chapter 7: A Warm Welcome

**\*\*1000 Hours, July 3, 2551 (Military Calendar)\*\***

**\*\*Aboard UNSC Destroyer Class-B \_Centurion\_\*\***

**\*\*On Routine Patrol in the Epsilon Eridani System.\*\***

It had been a strange turn of events. Exactly three days ago, Dr. Halsey had personally (she took the time to speak face-to-face to her Spartan-III, a kindness Sylvain thought she was incapable of) informed Sylvain that he would be going on a "trip," but he would return in a few days. It seemed like a great idea anyhow, though it had come from the one who had caused him pain and suffering for the better of mankind. He needed a vacation out of that little metal box they called his bunkroom.

But Dr. Halsey had not told him that he would be on a destroyer craft in space. Sylvain didn't like being in space at all. He felt so helpless as his life was in the hands of a bunch of ship-jockeys, relaying commands to each other that he did not understand at all. He was not a pilot, he was a soldier.

Sylvain wandered up and down many hallways and corridors, occasionally stumbling, and sometimes having to stop and lean upon the walls for a few seconds before he could start treading upon his own two feet safely. If he fell once, he would probably be locked up in the sick bay of the \_Centurion\_. He did not desire his trip away from the Section Three complex to be wasted laying down in a white bed, surrounded by sterile walls, being watched by quack doctors.

But little did he know that he was there on that ship for a reason.

A lieutenant in a freshly pressed navy-blue uniform had approached him in the center of a long corridor. Sylvain sluggishly saluted him,

not slamming his thumb and index finger into his forehead.

"At ease. Spartan-300 Sylvain Reno?" the lieutenant inquired.

Sylvain nodded once. "Yes, sir."

"Follow me, please."

This was not the first time that he had been led by a lieutenant through unknown "territory," but the last time it happened, his life changed forever. He wondered if he would be going through another transition, and he hoped that if he did, it wouldn't be half as terrible and frightening as the last.

The destination that the lieutenant was leading Sylvain to was a good distance from where they had begun. Many times, Sylvain had to embarrassingly stop, and regain his own balance to continue. But the lieutenant didn't become agitated or aggravated. He was well informed about the "sporadic and possibly psychotic" Spartan-300 Sylvain Reno, and, if anything, the lieutenant was frightened by his very presence.

It was a problem that the UNSC had been facing ever since Dr. Halsey had commenced the Spartan programs. Officers and soldiers alike had either become very alarmed by the super-human warriors, or, a much less desirable effect, threatened.

In front of two gigantic and intimidating sliding metal doors was where the lieutenant had finally halted. He waved his left hand twice to motion Sylvain inside.

Sylvain glanced up above the two doors. The room label read, in gold, bold letters, "ASSEMBLY HALL A." As he stepped in front of the doors, they swished open, allowing him inside.

The size of the assembly hall was twice that of the doors. There were rows upon rows of black padded seats, all pointed toward a large stage. A wooden podium bearing the UNSC flag, a blue field with stars and Earth in the corner, hung on the center, set up for the occasion. It was tasteful. Behind that, a set of windows had allowed a spectacular background setting for any event imagined.

Sylvain trotted down the center aisle, his eyes fixated upon a group of twenty-six people who filled the center-left front row seats. They were chattering amongst themselves, each having a very powerful voice. But when he had come to the end of the aisle, their talking had fallen completely dead silent. Each of them trained their eyes upon the red-bereted outsider, expressing complete indifference and apathy, some with disrespecting disdain playing their faces. None of them spoke a single utterance to him, they just eyed him, watching his every move should he decide to try something. Sylvain, not backing down from anyone or anything, stared at each of them right back with the same expression. He didn't like them one bit.

A familiar voice boomed from the many loudspeakers strategically set up around the room to maximize audibility for the speaker and the spectators. However, the volume was a just a little too loud. "Spartan-300, please take a seat."

Sylvain immediately turned his sights to the stage, but, just as it had been when he entered, it was completely empty save the decorated wooden podium. He did as he was told, but he stayed away from the others. They obviously harboured certain distaste for him, and he did not want to give them the pleasure of his company. They didn't deserve it.

Major Jim Stange stepped out from behind the burgundy curtains on stage left, and assumed his place behind the podium, adjusting the head of the microphone to set to his height. "At ease," his voice echoed.

Sylvain, taken completely aback by the presence of his old friend, wrinkled his brow in utter confusion. At ease?

He turned his head toward the others in audience with him. He had caught them standing only for a split-second before they each had returned to their seats simultaneously. But they were sitting before.

Those people were like a bunch of robots.

But was he one of \_them\_?

No. He would never be one of them.

Stange cleared his throat, and spoke into the microphone. His voice, thick, strong, and still as confident as ever, sounded.

"Spartan-II's, and Spartan-III's, you have each been called to this exclusive assembly for a particular reason."

They were the Spartan-II's? Why do they seem to hate me so much, Sylvain wondered.

"Spartan-II's, as you may or may not know, there has been a significant requirement for more of you. Unfortunately, as you DO know, the amount of time and resources it takes to successfully train a Spartan-II demands years and millions of dollars."

Behind the Major, a white screen retracted from the ceiling, and took its place, blocking the view of space. The lights inside the hall dimmed, and many different screens, all focusing on a Spartan-II and their creation, was displayed. Had Sylvain known his augmentations and their processes, he would have laughed at the laughable excuses for operations blinking on the screen.

"That is why," Stange continued, cutting off Sylvain's daydreaming state induced by the screen, "Section Three and High United Nations Space Command has decided to initiate the Spartan-III program." He had used a pause in his voice to compound the tone of seriousness that existed in this dire subject. To Sylvain, it had worked.

Stange turned his attention to Sylvain. "That's you, kid," he said with a warm smile curling the corners of his lips.

"Unfortunately, there was only one eligible candidate for the Spartan-III program." Many images of Sylvain, some taken during his days with the resistance, covered the remainder of the screen. Then, one single shot dominated all other photos: one of him smiling assertively and slyly.

A pang of nostalgia had infected his mind. He reminisced of that time in his life where he felt he had all he wanted. What he wouldn't give to go back to those days, he thought.

"However," Stange resumed his speech, talking louder now, "the Spartan-II's and the Spartan-III will be working together as a single unit in combat, and peacetime. Together, you can do more for the Human war effort against the Covenant than anything else could even dream about. Together, you all will fight the Covenant. And together, you will be victorious."

Stange was preparing to finish. "Now," he said, "Why don't you all introduce yourselves to your new teammate?"

Sylvain stood up from his seat just as the other Spartans had. Now that they realized just who he was, each of them had approached him with a grin, excepting a few of the more temperamental or self-respecting individuals. They were the prototypes; Sylvain was the wave of the future. Sylvain saluted each of them and shook their hands as he introduced himself.

Eventually, he had learnt all their names excepting their leader. Master Chief Petty Officer Spartan-117, John. He didn't grin or smile at all, but Sylvain had already held a considerable amount of utter respect for the strong and decisive Spartan-II. He snapped off the best salute he could possibly muster from his being.

"Sir," he said. "Spartan-300 Sylvain Reno at your service, sir!"

John gave Sylvain a quick once-over glance, his eyes traveling downward to his body, then suddenly upwards again. For what seemed like an eternity, John spoke not a single word. But soon, he returned the salute.

"So, you are the young Spartan I've heard so much about," he reverentially murmured after the salute. "I've also heard that you will be assigned to my squad. I'd like to say that this sort of addition will take some getting used to, but I am glad that a soldier of your caliber is on the field with us."

Sylvain smiled broadly, his confidence once lost now returning. His new leader was praising him already. "Sir, you can count on me, sir!" The response was filled with pride.

Up on the stage of the auditorium, Major Stange had been watching, and smiling. Sylvain was fitting in already, and the thought of the two of them doing what they desired most, getting their sweet revenge from the Covenant for annihilating Craft, side by side. As long as they were alive, the resistance would be alive as well.

Stange cleared his throat, and activated the auditorium's microphone once again. "Well, I'm glad to see that you all are getting along with your newest Spartan. Now, I want you all to take a week or two to relax, and get to know him. That sort of relationship will be invaluable on the battlegrounds."

John had something on his mind. He raised his voice so Stange would be able to hear him. "Sir," he said. "We all appreciate your offer,

but the best way we Spartans get to know each other is in the midst of battle. We formally request a mission."

Stange chuckled mixed in with weak coughing. "Yes, I would understand that request," he spoke. "Well, Spartans, I will see what I can do to get us into some action, but for now, just be ready to roll out any time!"

He finished the assembly, but he was also feeling the burning desire to combat the Covenant just as all of the twenty-seven Spartans did as well. "Spartans," he boomed, "dismissed!"

The Spartans all saluted the Major simultaneously, including Sylvain. Once again, in a long time, he felt like he was part of a team; the best team that ever had existed.

End  
file.